

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claims 1-13 (Canceled)

Claim 14 (Currently Amended): A formulation ~~for use in chrome-free and chrome tanning~~, comprising:

a clay mineral, which, after vigorous stirring for 30 minutes in water at 50°C, has a number average particle diameter of less than 2 μm , or a bimodal size distribution with a first, finely divided fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 0.5 μm , and a second, coarser fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 5 μm , determined in each case by the method according to ISO 13320-1, by combined laser light diffraction and light scattering, and wherein, the amount of the first, finely divided fraction is from 10 to 90% by weight;

and one or more substances selected from the group consisting of organic polymers, aldehyde tanning agents, sulfone tanning agents, resin tanning agents, phenol tanning agents, fatliquoring agents, vegetable tanning agents, dyes, pigments and mixtures thereof.

Claim 15 (Previously Presented): The formulation as claimed in claim 14, wherein the one or more substances are selected from aldehyde tanning agents, and wherein the aldehyde tanning agents are glutaraldehyde or a derivative of glutaraldehyde.

Claim 16 (Previously Presented): The formulation as claimed in claim 14, wherein the clay mineral has a number average particle diameter of less than 1 μm .

Claim 17 (Currently Amended): The formulation as claimed in claim 14, further comprising wherein one or more substances, which, owing to their chemical structure, are capable of forming strong hydrogen bridge bonds with the clay mineral, ~~are added to the clay mineral, before or during the use thereof, as a tanning agent.~~

Claim 18 (Previously Presented): The formulation as claimed in claim 14, wherein the clay mineral is a phyllosilicate.

Claim 19 (Previously Presented): The formulation as claimed in claim 14, wherein the phyllosilicate is a kaolinite, muscovite, montmorillonite, smectite, bentonite, or hectorite.

Claim 20 (Previously Presented): A tanning agent, comprising a clay mineral, which, after vigorous stirring for 30 minutes in water at 50°C, has a number average particle diameter of less than 2 μm , or a bimodal size distribution with a first, finely divided fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 0.5 μm , and a second, coarser fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 5 μm , and wherein, the amount of the first, finely divided fraction is from 10 to 90% by weight.

Claim 21 (Previously Presented): The tanning agent as claimed in claim 20, wherein the clay mineral has a number average particle diameter of less than 1 μm .

Claim 22 (Currently Amended): The tanning agent as claimed in claim 20, further comprising wherein one or more substances, which, owing to their chemical structure, are capable of forming strong hydrogen bridge bonds with the clay mineral, ~~are added to the clay mineral before or during the use thereof, as a tanning agent.~~

Claim 23 (Previously Presented): The tanning agent as claimed in claim 20, wherein the clay mineral is a phyllosilicate.

Claim 24 (Previously Presented): The tanning agent as claimed in claim 23, wherein the phyllosilicate is a kaolinite, smectite, muscovite, montmorillonite, bentonite, or hectorite.

Claim 25 (Currently Amended): A method ~~for preliminary tanning~~, comprising, ~~treating a substrate~~ contacting an animal hide with the tanning agent as claimed in claim 20.

Claim 26 (Currently Amended): A method ~~for retanning~~, comprising, ~~treating a substrate~~ contacting a tanned animal hide with the tanning agent as claimed in claim 20.

Claim 27 (Cancelled).

Claim 28 (Previously Presented): The formulation of claim 17, wherein the one or more substances which, owing to their chemical structure, are capable of forming strong hydrogen bridge bonds with the clay mineral, are selected from the group consisting of urea or urea derivates, alcohols, polyols, propylene carbonate, organic amides, urethanes, saccharides or derivatives of saccharides, nitrocellulose, sulfite cellulose, ethylhexylcellulose, and mixtures thereof.

Claim 29 (Previously Presented): The tanning agent of claim 22, wherein the one or more substances which, owing to their chemical structure, are capable of forming strong hydrogen bridge bonds with the clay mineral, are selected from the group consisting of urea or urea derivates, alcohols, polyols, propylene carbonate, organic amides, urethanes,

saccharides or derivatives of saccharides, nitrocellulose, sulfite cellulose, ethylhexylcellulose, and mixtures thereof.

Claim 30 (New): The formulation as claimed in Claim 14, comprising:

a clay mineral, which, after vigorous stirring for 30 minutes in water at 50°C, has a bimodal size distribution with a first, finely divided fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 0.5 μm , and a second, coarser fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 5 μm , determined in each case by the method according to ISO 13320-1, by combined laser light diffraction and light scattering, and wherein, the amount of the first, finely divided fraction is from 10 to 90% by weight.

Claim 31 (New): The tanning agent as claimed in Claim 20, comprising:

a clay mineral, which, after vigorous stirring for 30 minutes in water at 50°C, has a bimodal size distribution with a first, finely divided fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 0.5 μm , and a second, coarser fraction, whose number average particle diameter is less than 5 μm , determined in each case by the method according to ISO 13320-1, by combined laser light diffraction and light scattering, and wherein, the amount of the first, finely divided fraction is from 10 to 90% by weight.

Claim 32 (Currently Amended): A method, comprising contacting an animal hide with the tanning agent as claimed in claim 31.

Claim 33 (Currently Amended): A method, comprising contacting a tanned animal hide with the tanning agent as claimed in claim 31.

Claim 34 (New): The formulation as claimed in claim 14, wherein the clay mineral is muscovite.

Claim 35 (New): The tanning agent as claimed in claim 20, wherein the clay mineral is muscovite.

Claim 36 (New): The formulation as claimed in claim 14, wherein the clay mineral is hectorite.

Claim 37 (New): The tanning agent as claimed in claim 20, wherein the clay mineral is hectorite.